



Statement to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Agenda Item 4 c

Health

Centre for Organisation Research & Education (CORE)

Respected Brother Chairperson and Members of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Khurumjari! Respectful Greetings to All who are gathered here today

We thank the Forum for continuing to seriously examine the situation of health of indigenous peoples globally as a major mandate area.

In the North East region of India, inhabited by over 250 indigenous peoples, the health situation has rapidly deteriorated over the last decade. This situation has been acknowledged by the concerned Ministries of the Government of India and is clearly evident in the statistics regularly collected by the Government.

However, little is being done to address the root causes of this deterioration including the massive displacement affecting our peoples and the on-going and worsening violent armed conflicts in the region.

Globalisation has also had serious impacts on our peoples' health with the increasing costs of medicines and health care and the breakdown of the public health care systems and dependence on private health professionals.

We would also like to bring to the forum's attention that UNICEF, which a few years ago had initiated programmes for provision of water and sanitation for children in schools in the region has now closed this programme without clear indications as to why.

We thank the inter-agency support group for submitting its joint report on disaggregated data collection. We also thank WHO for its report introducing a Outline global strategy. However both these reports fail to address the specific situation of indigenous peoples which has been the focus of the international decade.

It is clear that the forum has a challenging task ahead as indigenous issues are inter-related and health is one of the issues which has a very direct relationship with socio-economic development, environment, culture, education and human rights. Therefore the recommendations from this forum must take this interrelatedness into account.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Permanent Forum should:

1. Member States and UN agencies

- 1) Remind UN Member States, UN agencies, funds and specialised bodies that a time bound programme for implementation of the commitments addressed in "A World Fit for Children", the outcome document of the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children, 2002 be presented by concerned UN agencies as regards to health and related issues of indigenous children
- 2) Recommend strongly to UNDP, other UN agencies and governments that a prioritized, clear and comprehensive strategy to ensure achievement of the Millennium Development Goals must be developed and implemented in partnership with indigenous peoples and children, particularly taking into account the eighth Goal to develop an open and non-discriminatory global partnership for development.
- 3) That its existing recommendations regarding health, made during its first session, which have not been implemented, be pursued for implementation at the earliest with close cooperation with the Committee on Indigenous Health. In particular, recommendations regarding:
 - a) The organising of two technical seminars to plan a UN system-wide strategy to address the health needs of indigenous children and women, and to assess existing programmes within the UN system with a view to expand them appropriately to include indigenous peoples and assess safety protocols relating to immunisation and vaccinations, respectively;
 - b) Preparation of a study to determine the extent of indigenous peoples' access to health care and ways and means to make health care culturally appropriate;
 - c) And organising a working group on free and prior informed consent and participatory research guidelines within the context of sustainable health development of indigenous peoples should be implemented;
- 4) Ensure closer and sustained interaction between the Forum and indigenous peoples on health issues by facilitating the Committee on Indigenous Health, the global indigenous peoples' caucus on health since 1997, to:
 - a) enhance interaction with traditional healers and practitioners
 - b) gather information on indigenous health systems and practices with an objective to recognise and legitimise such systems and practices
 - c) be actively and closely involved in all stages of the proposed study on access to health care and culturally appropriate health care for indigenous peoples;
- 5) Propose that with regard to indigenous women's and children's health, relevant UN programmes, funds and specialised bodies give priority attention to:
 - a) The gendered aspect of indigenous health knowledge, distinguish and empower indigenous women's health knowledge and contribution to health
 - b) The reproductive health of indigenous women, with focus on adolescent and antenatal nutrition and on HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections

- c) The identification of specific policies, guidelines and programmes, and their implementation, for indigenous children, youth and women
 - d) The mental health of indigenous children especially those affected by separation from families and communities through displacement and those in residential or boarding schools and corrective institutions, supporting and encouraging primarily indigenous initiatives to address the problem through indigenous techniques and systems of healing and rehabilitation into the communities.
- 6) Ensure closer continuing and inter-sessional relationship between indigenous peoples and the members of the Forum by
- a) Identifying, together with indigenous peoples, the various indigenous peoples, communities and groups within the countries in Asia, with special attention to those who are few in numbers and threatened
 - b) Initiating sustained efforts for the Forum member/s from Asia to visit each country, giving priority to those countries where the indigenous peoples' movements and organisations are weakest and finding resources to organise meetings with them through partnerships with supporting organisations, funds and development cooperation initiatives;
- 7) Request Prof. P. Pinheiro, Independent Expert appointed on the UN Study on violence, to pay special attention to the health impact of violence on indigenous children by dedicating a special section of his study to this issue.
- 8) Request Dr. Rodolfo Stavenhagen, UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Indigenous people, to dedicate its forthcoming report to the situation of indigenous children giving particular attention to their health and survival issues.
- 9) Draw the urgent attention of the Special Rapporteurs on Slavery and Trafficking to this situation of trafficking and slavery of indigenous children and request their particular attention to this issue with a focus on sub-Saharan Africa.
- 10) Transmit the recommendations of the Forum to the Committee on the Rights of the Child for its consideration during the General Discussion Day to be held on 19 September 2003 in Geneva.

II. Inter-Agency Support Group

- 1) Make clear recommendations to the Inter-Agency Support Group and the World Health Organisation to be mindful of the well established and widely accepted understanding that indigenous peoples are not ethnic populations or ethnic groups, which are categories that come within the purview of minorities and their rights as
- 2) Urgently convene an expert seminar on issues of data collection and data disaggregation to give direction to and assist in accurately portraying the situation of Indigenous peoples, with the participation of indigenous peoples' experts and the Committee on Indigenous Health.
- 3) Recommend that the IASG and its constituent bodies and agencies ensure Indigenous representation, and full and meaningful participation in the development and planning related to Indigenous issues, policy and initiatives.

III. World Health Organisation

- 1) Clearly recommend to the World Health Organisation to revise its *Outline global strategy on the health of marginalised ethnic populations* as presented in its report to the Forum, in close consultation with Indigenous peoples and their organisations, and the Committee on Indigenous Health (the global Indigenous Health Caucus), so that it may be entirely consistent with the evolution of standards within the UN system, appropriately and accurately address the health of Indigenous peoples and invite wide acceptance from Indigenous peoples.
- 2) Encourage and urge the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) to rapidly establish an engagement policy for indigenous and tribal peoples that is based on equal partnership and which is accountable and inclusive, to be implemented with adequate resources from the regular budget of these specialised agencies.
- 3) As an important and constructive step, the report and recommendations of the International Consultation on the Health of Indigenous Peoples, WHO Headquarters, Geneva, November 1999 referred to by the World Health Assembly in its resolution (agenda item 18) WHA 54.16 of 22 May 2001 be immediately made public and submitted to the Forum for its information and urgent consideration.

IV. Global Fund Against AIDS, TB and Malaria and UNAIDS

- 1) Recommend that the UNAIDS and GFATM join the UN Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues (formed by UN agencies to interact with the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues), in order to effectively implement their significant roles and responsibilities pertaining to Indigenous peoples' health.
- 2) Establish, and secure funds for, consultations between UNAIDS, the Global Fund and the Committee on Indigenous Health regarding culturally appropriate participation of Indigenous nations and communities in the development and planning process for policy initiatives.
- 3) With the active and meaningful participation of Indigenous peoples' organisations, disseminate and communicate information about for prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS that is relative to the reality in which Indigenous peoples live and prioritize support for programmatic interventions.